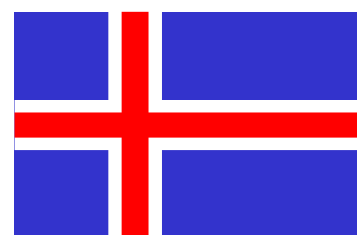


**COUNTRY
CHAPTER**

ICE

BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ICELAND



1. Resettlement Policy

Iceland has received groups of refugees for resettlement since 1956. Between 1956 and 2007 a total of 481 refugees were resettled in the country. The Icelandic Refugee Committee (until 2005 the Council) was established in 1996 and since then Iceland has overseen the reception of refugees annually or every other year, approximately 22 refugees each year, as a part of the UNHCR Resettlement Programme. In 2007 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs announced the establishment of an annual quota of 25 to 30 refugees. The quota for 2007 is 30 individuals.

The Icelandic Refugee Committee is a consultative body on refugees representing the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Icelandic Red Cross. The Ministry of Social Affairs, through the Icelandic Refugee Committee, is responsible for the selection, admission and integration of refugees in Iceland while working in close co-operation with the concerned ministries, local authorities and the Red Cross.

The Icelandic Government has earmarked funds for an annual resettlement quota within the approved Finance Act.

2. Criteria for Refugee Status Eligibility and Asylum

Refugees eligible for resettlement in Iceland are recognised refugees according to the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Statute of Refugees (section 44 of the Icelandic Act on Foreigners no. 96/2002), as well as according regional instruments.

It is a precondition that resettlement takes place on the basis of an arrangement with UNCHR and upon their request. The individual's need for protection has to be confirmed by the UNHCR and the refugee's ability to integrate in Iceland is taken into consideration.

3. Criteria for Resettlement

Individuals eligible for resettlement in Iceland are refugees recognised under UNHCR's mandate who for various reasons cannot remain in their first country of asylum or return to their country of origin and fall into one of the following categories:

Legal or physical protection needs, when the refugee meets one of these conditions:

- Immediate or long-term threat of forced repatriation or expulsion.
- Threat of arbitrary arrest, detention or imprisonment.
- Threat to human rights or physical integrity/safety, analogous to that considered under the refugee definition and rendering asylum untenable.

Refugees victims of violence and /or torture. Refugees victims of violence and/or torture who require special medical attention. Their resettlement in Iceland is subject to the availability of appropriate medical services.

Women at Risk. Women facing serious physical and/or psychological threats (rape, sexual harassment, violence, exploitation, torture) lacking the traditional protection of their families or communities.

Refugees without local integration prospects in the first country of asylum, under specific circumstances, refugees who do not have an opportunity to establish themselves in their country of refuge in a manner appropriate to their cultural, social, religious or educational background. When refugees remain a certain period in a country of asylum without being able to integrate and there is no prospect for repatriation in the near future, they can be considered for resettlement.

4. Resettlement Allocations

The Government of Iceland decides the allocation of the quota in close consultation with the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Icelandic Refugee Committee makes a proposal on the basis of UNHCR assessment of overall resettlement needs, as well as on the basis of an interview by a delegation from Iceland, in the country of asylum, with the individuals or refugee families that have been recommended by UNHCR field offices. The selection delegation represents members from the Ministries concerned, as well as the Directorate of Immigration and the Icelandic Red Cross.

5. Admissibility for Resettlement

No special constraints on admissibility are given, see however chapter 3.

6. Submissions and Processing via Dossier Selection

The processing of refugees in Iceland is mainly carried out through In-Country Selection.

7. Submissions and Processing via In-Country Selection

The destination of the annual interview mission is decided by the Refugee Committee in close consultation with UNHCR. The Icelandic Red Cross plays an important role in the communication between the Icelandic authorities and the UNHCR.

Before leaving for the selection in the country of asylum the selection delegation and Icelandic Refugee Committee receive the Resettlement Registration Forms regarding individuals and families recommended by the respective UNHCR field office. The number of cases studied and interviewed is higher than the number of cases that will finally be offered asylum in Iceland. Each individual case is studied thoroughly.

The names of refugees are also investigated in advance by the Directorate of Immigration and problems with documents identified. Upon arrival in the country of asylum the selection committee starts with an cultural orientation session about Icelandic society and culture, climate and geography. The cultural orientation also covers information regarding obstacles the refugees will inevitably meet This introduction is offered to the whole group of refugees selected by the local UNHCR.

Before a decision is reached all the cases are interviewed by the selection delegation as well as observed during the cultural orientation session. It is stressed that all family members participate in the interview, even the youngest ones. The main objective of the interview is to assess the individual's or the family's present situation and how they feel about moving to Iceland. The delegation usually does neither ask about the past or the information already documented by UNHCR; the focus is on the present and future. A decision is finally taken based upon the overall evaluation of the need for asylum as well as on prospects of successful integration.

Upon arrival in Iceland, the selection mission informs the Minister of Social Affairs and the Refugee Committee of its recommendation. The Ministry of Social Affairs notifies UNHCR headquarters and the UNHCR field office of its decision by sending a list with the names of every individual that is offered the right to settle in Iceland as soon as possible after return of the delegation to Iceland, usually within 10 days. Travel arrangements are prepared by the IOM in close cooperation with the Icelandic Red Cross and the UNHCR field office.

Every effort is made to process the entry visas as fast as possible so that the period between the decision of the Icelandic authorities and the arrival of the refugees in Iceland is as short as possible.

8. Emergency Cases

No accelerated procedures for the processing of emergency cases are yet in place, although there is the possibility of looking at individual cases on an ad hoc basis.

9. Special Categories

In 2005 and 2007 the resettlement program in Iceland received women and children under the definition *Women at Risk*.

Between 1996 and 2003 the quota refugees came from former Yugoslavia. Iceland has also supported a return program which is operated by the Croatian Red Cross aiming at assisting elderly and vulnerable refugees to move back to their former homes in Croatia where they had lived before the war.

10. Family Reunification of Refugees

The Government of Iceland acknowledges that family unity is an important factor that facilitates the integration of refugees in their country of resettlement. Cases of family reunification are dealt with under the general provisions of the immigration law, on a case-by-case basis. Reunification of families is not counted within the resettlement quota.

11. Medical Requirements

The Icelandic authorities make no specific medical requirements. However, every refugee resettled in Iceland undergoes a thorough medical examination upon arrival and special health- and medical needs are identified.

12. Travel

Travel is arranged by IOM in close co-operation with UNHCR and the Icelandic Red Cross. Travel expenses are paid by the Icelandic Government.

Representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs/Refugee Committee, the Icelandic Red Cross and the respective local community welcome the refugees upon arrival in Iceland.

13. Status on Arrival

Refugees accepted for resettlement in Iceland are granted refugee status according to the 1951 Convention and Icelandic Act on Foreigners nr. 96/2002. The refugees will be subsequently granted residence and work permits. They will be eligible to apply for citizenship after 5 years of continuous residence in Iceland.

14. Domestic Settlement and Community Services

14.1 Actors and division of labour

The Ministry of Social Affairs has the principal responsibility for the reception and integration of refugees, which is carried out on the one hand by *the local municipality* and on the other hand by the *Red Cross*, according to contracts between the Ministry and the respective actors. The municipalities as well as the Red Cross assign project managers to monitor the program at every level. The program during the first year is financed entirely by government funds since the support program for each family or individual is planned for one year. The refugees are expected to participate fully in the program.

During this year the family is provided with housing, support families, financial assistance, counselling, language courses and introductory courses about Iceland and Icelandic society. After the first year the refugees have the same right as other residents in the municipality to social assistance, such as financial assistance if necessary, social counselling and housing assistance.

The local authority provides the families with housing and financial support and makes sure that language courses are offered to the adults, that children are provided with Icelandic language courses and special support in school if necessary. The municipality also offers counselling and psychological treatment if needed. A particular effort is made to engage all the children in gainful activities outside the school curriculum such as summer projects run by the local authorities. Adults are encouraged to seek education and are often provided with special financial assistance to enable them to do so. Social workers with special training in multicultural social work assist the individuals with their different needs.

The Icelandic Red Cross provides support and assistance to resettlement refugees during the program. The local Red Cross provides basic furnishings and other household appliances that become the property of the refugees and is also in charge of support families which are assigned to each refugee family. Preferably each family has 2 to 4 support families. The support families scheme is based on the initiative of individual citizens who volunteer with the Icelandic Red Cross to assist refugees to integrate in their respective local communities. Support families undergo special training before being formally assigned to a refugee, including a psychological aid course and a full briefing on the refugee's cultural background. During the program, support families meet with the Red Cross project manager on a regular basis. The Red Cross makes a special effort to provide psychosocial support for its volunteers and offers a package of group sessions and private interviews.

The Red Cross also offers courses in first aid and psychological support to refugees. Three individual interviews are also offered to refugees by Red Cross psychologists during their first 18 months in Iceland.

To ensure the cooperation of the different actors there are two *working groups*. The coordinating group at the central level represents members from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the director of the local social services and representatives from the Icelandic Red Cross and the local Red Cross. Members of the steering group at the local level represent the project managers from the Red Cross and the local authority.

14.2 Services and assistance

Upon arrival, refugees are provided with an apartment for one year. If they wish to keep on living in the apartments they are in general able to do so. Refugees are provided with furniture, a television, radio, vacuum-cleaner, refrigerator and washing machine, as well as clothing if necessary. In addition, they are provided with allowances for their living expenses, rent included, according to a standard fixed by the Social Services of the receiving municipality.

All refugees receive a medical check-up upon arrival in Iceland, medical and dental care is provided as necessary, free of charge, as well as eye-examinations, during the first months of residence in Iceland. Refugees have the same access to health services as Icelandic citizens and are charged in the same way.



Cultural orientation on Iceland is provided within the framework of language training. When the receiving community is relatively small, information sessions on the background of resettled refugees are provided to the public at the beginning of the programme. This contributes to the development of a good understanding between the refugees and the local community.

Language training is provided during the first year of residence, five days per week. An effort is made to hire language teachers that master the language of the refugees, otherwise the teachers and the refugees receive interpretation assistance, if needed. All refugees are expected to attend classes of Icelandic language for the initial 9 months.

Due to a low unemployment rate in Iceland, most refugees are usually employed by the end of the first year. The project manager in the local authority is responsible for liaising with potential employers and arranging job interviews for the refugee in co-operation with the Directorate of Labour. It is, however, important that the refugees participate completely in the educational program provided, especially the language courses which are in fact obligatory. Therefore refugees are not expected to become employed during the first six months of the program as they are expected to engage themselves in the language training and learning about the Icelandic society.

Psychological assistance, language instruction and cultural orientation are provided to refugees throughout the integration process. At the end of the one-year support programme, refugees are expected to become self-sufficient and are entitled to the same level of social assistance as other Icelandic residents.

15. Reference Material

-  Icelandic Nationality Act, No. 100 dated 23/12/1952 and amended in 1982 and 1998.
-  Icelandic Immigration Law, 1965.